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SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report of South Africa

Paper submitted by South Africa**

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A. National geographical names authority

1. The South African geographical names authority, the National Place Names Committee (NPNC), met twice a year, while its subcommittee, which does preparatory work, met at intervals. Two lists of standardized geographical names were prepared, Official Place Names in the Republic of South Africa Approved 1977-1988 (1991), and Official Place Names in the Republic of South Africa Approved 1989-1991 (at the press).

2. The orthographic rules for writing Afrikaans geographical names and Zulu geographical names were revised.

3. A subcommittee was appointed to investigate the desirability of statutory powers for the NPNC. Its recommendation was against such a step.

4. At the end of 1991 the four-year term of office of members of the NPNC expired, and members were appointed or reappointed for a further period of four years.

B. Implementation of United Nations resolutions

5. To encourage the implementation of United Nations resolutions by the relevant authorities, a paper entitled "Implementing United Nations on the standardization of geographical names" was presented at the Fifth Southern African Names Congress, held at Mmabatho, and a paper on "Geographical names authorities and the treatment of names" was read at the 1990 Linguistic Congress of Southern Africa at Stellenbosch. The Executive Committee of the Linguistic Society was requested to petition the relevant authorities to ensure implementation of United Nations resolutions. The topic was also dealt with in depth in the presidential address at the Sixth Southern African Names Congress of 1991 at Berg-en-Dal. A memorandum urging more comprehensive compliance with United Nations resolutions appertaining to the publication of standardized names was submitted to the NPNC. The NPNC took cognizance of these resolutions and endorsed their essentiality. Implementation, however, is dictated by financial considerations.

6. In compliance with resolutions 18 of the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 15 of the Third Conference, and 16 of the Fourth Conference, recommending the holding of training courses in applied toponymy; resolution 15 of the Fifth Conference, recommending the establishment of national geographical names authorities; and resolution 21 of the Fifth Conference specifically recommending that such a training course be held inter alia in the Africa East Division (which includes Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe), a training course was arranged in collaboration with the Onomastic Research Centre of the HSRC and the University of Pretoria. It was hosted by the University of Pretoria. Experts of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names presented the course: F. J. Ormeling Jnr., N. Kadmon and P. E. Raper.

7. In pursuance of resolution 5 of the Fifth Conference, recommending the provision of training in toponymy at the university or corresponding academic level, a national geographical names survey was launched in South Africa. All the universities in the country as well as several other institutions are participating in this survey. The training course mentioned above served to prepare participants in the survey and thus also addressed resolution 5 of the Fifth Conference.

8. In pursuance of resolutions 4 of the Fourth Conference and 14 of the Fifth Conference, a third edition of the "Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors - South Africa" was prepared. This edition was necessitated by the revision of the orthographical rules of both Afrikaans and Zulu by the NPNC.

C. Publications on geographical names

NATIONAL Place Names Committee (comp)., (1991) Official Place Names in the Republic of South Africa Approved 1977-1988 (Pretoria, Government Printer).

NATIONAL Place Names Committee (comp)., Official Place Names in the Republic of South Africa Approved 1989-1991 (Pretoria, Government Printer (at the press)).

P. E. RAPER (1989)., Dictionary of Southern African Place Names (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers).

_____, Illustrated Dictionary of Southern African Place Names (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers (at the press)).

_____, Concise Gazetteer for South Africa (in preparation).

D. Cooperation with professional institutions

Economic Commission for Africa

9. It had been reported at the Fifth Conference that efforts were being made by South Africa to assist neighbouring countries in organizing national toponymic programmes. The concern over non-participation by some African countries in the activities of the Group of Experts, and the concomitant dormancy in toponymic activity, has also been an issue of concern to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). At the request of the Secretary, contact was made with ECA, which is desirous of revitalizing, harmonizing and coordinating toponymic activity in conjunction with the relevant authorities in the Group of Experts. At the request of the Chief of ECA's Cartography and Remote-Sensing Unit the names and addresses of potential contacts in African countries were forwarded to the ECA for contacts.

International Committee of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS)

10. At the XVIIth International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, held at Helsinki in August 1990, at both the Board Meeting and the Members' Meeting of ICOS the matter of cooperation was broached, reinforcing contacts made by Ms. E. M. Närhi of Finland.

E. Toponymic guidelines

11. In pursuance of resolution 4 of the Fourth Conference, the expert from South Africa, as Coordinator for Toponymic Guidelines, requested the Secretariat to distribute a letter to all countries encouraging those countries that had not yet prepared "Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors", to do so. Countries that had already submitted toponymic guidelines were encouraged to consider whether a later edition was required. In addition, a separate communication was directed at each southern African country mentioned above, and this was accompanied by a copy of the third edition of "Toponymic guidelines for South Africa" which could serve as a model or example.